9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

town consists of streets of houses of peasant style strung The Small 361 [364] end to end, picturesque with their washes of many colours, but perpetuating and even accentuating the filth which can be tolerated in a village setting of streams and fields but which becomes highly objectionable under urban conditions. On the other hand there are some spaciously-planned country towns which have an air of quiet opulence reminding one of the English heritage to which they owe their foundation. I am aware that in saying this I am ignoring the " inner flame " of the Irish towns, but it cannot be denied that externally they have much to learn from the older civic traditions of the sister isle. Dr. Arensberg has analysed the pattern of the country town and described it as " an extension townwards of the countryman's own social order." He shows that, until recent times, its economy has been that of distribution, not production. Banks and pubs and shops do most of the business and owing to the family system " Ireland is better supplied with shops, at least in number, than any comparable European nation." If we exclude the Lough Neagh basin, [162] all the denser areas of population are coastal and most of the country's manufacturing industries are concentrated in the ports (Fig. 108).

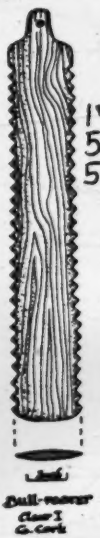
To return to the fair, we have tried to show how the 443 periodic gatherings in which they originated were associated 786 with ritual and emotional experiences connected with the 578 celebration of recurring events such as seed-time and harvest. Breaking the routine of toil, it is characteristic that much licence was permitted on these occasions. Until recent times a strong spirit of revelry and a temporary slackening of the moral code distinguished the great Irish fairs. Even to-day the police or civic guards make allowances for fair day and turn a blind eye to many offences against the law: it is recognized as a time of special licence. Games, dancing and faction fights were the order of the day once the buying and selling were over. Until a generation ago cruel "knuckle-dusters " (Fig. 109) were carried in readiness, and the countryman's heavy felt hat was worn as a defence against the blackthorn shillelagh.

Fig. 109.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

produce a buzzing noise. The toy is known in Co. Carlow as a " whee-doodle " and in Co. Down, where it seems formerly to have been regarded as a " sacred " thing, as a " boomer." Professor Haddon has described specimens from Co. Antrim and Co. Cork. About the Co. Carlow example in the Dublin Museum Dr. Raftery provides me with the following note. " A boy was whirling it around and an old man who saw him was very angry and told him to take the thing home and burn it, as otherwise he would bring bad luck on the countryside." This was in 1921. I illustrate a " bull-roarer " from Cape Clear, Co. Cork (Fig. 113). Its Irish name is Cláirín Búirthe.

534
524
[777]



171
524
534

Fig. 113.

It is, of course, possible that some Irish localities may have learnt the use of this toy from stray specimens brought home from regions where it is still in regular ceremonial use, but when we remember all the other Irish survivals we cannot doubt that the bull-roarer is a relic of the past that has lost, or nearly lost, its sacred character. The bull-roarer has an almost world-wide distribution. It is said to have been employed in ancient Greece in connexion with the Dionysiac mysteries. We can imagine its employment in the initiation rites and magical practices of pagan times so picturesquely reconstructed by Professor Macalister in his book " Ancient Ireland." In various parts of the modern world the bull-roarer is used as a rain charm, in raising a wind or producing thunder, in driving game, herding cattle (*cf.* Chapter 6) or preparing for fishing, in rites of initiation and circumcision, in funeral festivities and mask dances: it is a general rule that the instrument must not be seen by women or children on pain of death. In the words of Haddon: " This insignificant toy is perhaps the most ancient, widely spread and sacred religious symbol in the world."

Of great antiquity and wide distribution, the spear-thrower is another instrument which appears to have survived in Ireland as a toy, used as a throwing stick in boys' games. And another toy " not yet connected with any ceremonial usage " but paralleled among the Chinese and the North

171
524
[411]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

526 perfect sphere the rounded igneous pebbles which are selected for the purpose. One wonders whether some of the many cup-marked stones which turn up in the fields in certain districts—I have seen many in Inishowen in Donegal—were used for shaping stones, such as the sling-stones with which champion slingers, of whom the legendary Cuchulainn was one, performed [411] their feats. The sling and the sling-rod were originally hunting weapons and probably instruments of war, and one of the last refuges of slinging as a pastime was the now vanished Claddagh, the fishing suburb of Galway, where a man was not reckoned a good shot until he could strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen.[1]

312 Where a holy well has dried up—the usual explanation is that it was desecrated and moved its position—the sanctity of the 824 site may be transferred to a tree. The so-called pin-well at 778 Arboe in Co. Tyrone is a beech tree, hirsute with pins and nails, growing in the burying ground on a Celtic monastic site. A rag-well at Clonmel is visited by mountain farmers who hang rag offerings on briars at lambing and calving times, and afterwards place more rags appropriate in number to the increase obtained.[2] There is on the island of Inishmurray a wind- [821] well which has the power of controlling the wind, the ritual being to empty the well to produce a calm. Sticks and stones also 789 figure in wind-raising ceremonies, and 'the rude stone image of 778 Inniskea' (Inishkea in Co. Mayo), which was dressed up in flannel each New Year's Day, had powers of producing either storm or calm.[3] Powerful magic was worked by a wooden statue of St. Macdara, formerly kept in his chapel—an oratory of early type with projecting *antae*—on an island dedicated to the saint in the extreme south-western corner of Co. Galway. Sailors passing the island dipped their sails three times in honour of the image, but we are left to guess what superstitions were involved from the statement that about the year 1640 'the bishop of Tuam caused it to be buried for weighty reasons'.[4]

[1] *U.J.A.*, 2 (1854), 164.
[2] *Béaloideas*, 15 (1945), 284.
[3] C. Otway, *Erris and Tyrawly*, 107.
[4] C. R. Browne, *Carna and Mweenish*.